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AFFIRMATIONS

God in the Modern World

The Problem of Evil

by Professor A. E. Taylor

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143 E. [illegible]
Claremont, California

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THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The Issues Involved

If we are to discuss any of the great issues life forces on us profitably, we must begin by getting our problems clearly stated. Unless we do this, we are likely to waste our time in two ways. We may raise a question to which we can give no answer, either because it is really unmeaning, or because we cannot come by the information which would enable us to answer it. Or we may unconsciously confuse several questions and try to answer one by discussing another, and that, too, will be waste of time and ingenuity.

In dealing with the riddle of evil which has tortured mankind from the dawn of reflection on human suffering and misdoing, we meet three different questions which it is as easy to confuse as important to keep distinct. The first is what evil is; the second, how it comes to exist; the third, how an almighty and all-good God, if he exists, can tolerate it.

It is the first question which is answered, well or ill, by saying such things as that there really is no evil, the evil is a pure illusion, or that it is the same thing as pain, or as "arrested development." Typical answers to the second are such statements as that evil is the work of a bad principle, or a consequence of the fall of Satan, or the sin of the first man, or is inseparable from "matter," or arises in the "struggle for existence." The theist is dealing with the third

if he contends that God permits evil as a salutary discipline, and his opponents if they retort that an almighty and perfectly good God could not sanction its existence, and that its reality therefore prov that there is either no God, or one who is deficient in power, or goodness, or in both. The first question is strictly philosophical, the second historical, the third specifically theological.

And we should note that it is only the first kind of question, the philosophical, which we have a right to regard as always answerable in principle. If a man asserts the reality of anything, an electron, a bit of protoplasm, a human soul, an angel, I am always entitled to ask him what he takes this thing to be. If he can give no answer, he literally " does not know what he is talking about." To the second question the right answer may be that it cannot be answered at present for want of evidence, or even that it will always be unanswerable, because the necessary evidence will never be forthcoming. The third question only arises for a mind which is prepared to consider a religious interpretation of the world seriously, and, like the second, may prove to be unanswerable. We may find that we can say no more on the matter than that the reasons for God's permission of evil, for example, are a mystery, but the fact that it is permitted is not a fatal objection to belief in God.

It has sometimes been made a complaint against philosophy or religion that they do not explain how evil came into the world, or do not completely justify its presence there by showing what valuable results it subserves. Before we repeat such reproaches, we ought to consider carefully whether any conceivable philosophy or theology could possibly give us either

full explanation or a complete justification of the existence of evil. For it is surely certain that when science, philosophy, and theology have done all they can do, the world still remains a mysterious and surprising thing ; any account of it which really eliminated all the mystery from it would be proved by that one consideration to be a false and superficial account.

This needs to be kept in mind in judging the distinctive assertion, made by Christianity, for example, about evil. We shall see, I think, that Christianity has something definite and important to say on the question what evil is, and that what it has to say on this point is its real characteristic contribution to the problem. To the further questions how evil has come into the universe and how its presence there can be justified, it has no complete solution and pretends to have none. It does not profess that it will enable us to answer " all questions in the earth or out of it," or provide us with a short-and-easy formula by which to " justify the ways of God to man." Its first great writer long ago said that " we see now through a mirror, in a riddle," and its most illustrious thinkers have usually been content with the modest view that philosophy can do no more for most of the central affirmations of religious faith than to refute the allegation that they are inherently unreasonable. A philosophy which undertook to strip the world of mystery by giving a final and luminous solution to every problem the inquiring mind can reasonably raise might have striking merits, or it might not, but its spirit would be anything but Christian.

The Need for Discussion of the Problem a Practical One

Of course, when we speak of the answer given by a religion or a philosophy to the question what evil is, we do not mean a formal definition of the term *evil*. It may fairly be doubted whether evil can be formally defined at all, any more than good, and, at any rate, it is not by such a definition that any great religion or philosophy has tried to deal with the problem. What we really want from a philosophy or religion is something different and more important; we want a true and significant statement *about* evil, a statement indicating some character to be found in some degree in everything that is bad in life, and in the intensest degree in the evils which are recognisably the worst. We want, in fact, to be told what the typically evil features of life are, and which of them all is the most typical, the worst of confessed evils.

And our reason for wanting such a statement is at bottom a very practical one. We do not want to know which are the worst evils of life merely as a satisfaction for our harmless curiosity, but because we need to order our life so as to escape these evils, just as we want to understand disease in order to know how to prevent or cure it. If we make a false estimate of the evils of life, we cannot expect to be properly on our guard against them, and the consequence will be that we shall make shipwreck of our own lives. Suppose, for example, we go through life with the conviction that pain is the only real evil, or at least much the worst of evils, the rules we shall follow for the guidance of our conduct will be rules for the avoidance of all the pain which can be avoided.

If there really should be things in life which are much worse than pain, and therefore much more to be avoided, our rule of avoiding pain at all costs will lead us dreadfully astray. If a religion or a philosophy is to be something we can shape our lives by —and, unless they are that, it is not clear why we should think it seriously important to have either— its view of evil must not be morally false or superficial; it must not shut its eyes to real evils of any kind, and it must not mistake minor evils for major, or major for minor. This is no more than to say that a philosophy or religion which contradicts moral truth cannot itself be the *truth*.

Some Typical Theories, Ancient and Modern

There are a number of theories about evil which are pretty clearly shown to be superficial, and therefore false, by this simple consideration that they give us either no rule of life at all, or a morally bad rule. Thus there is, for example, the extreme view, which crops up so persistently in all the literatures of the world, that there simply is no such thing as evil in the universe; the belief that evil exists is a pure illusion. "There's nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so"; that is, when I call anything bad or evil, I mean no more than that I personally happen to feel a dislike for it, and personal likes and dislikes are merely arbitrary and capricious.

The triviality and superficiality of such a doctrine appear at once when we reflect that no rule of "choice and avoidance," good or bad, could possibly be based on it. The nearest approach a man could make to acting the theory out would, I suppose, be to seek

nothing in life and avoid nothing, but to take everything passively "as it comes." And this is strictly impossible. Even to decide on a policy of absolute non-intervention is to *make* a decision, and often enough to make a very momentous decision. In point of fact, we regularly find that the type of theoretical quietist who does try to make the illusoriness of evil the basis of a rule of life falls into glaring inconsistency. He usually proceeds to recommend us to get rid of the dislikes which are the source of the illusion, to make a great effort by meditation, and possibly, by highly disagreeable "ascetic" discipline, to cultivate detachment and indifference. But the more earnestly the advice is given, the more obvious it is that the adviser, in spite of his professed conviction that nothing is evil, really believes that there is, at least, one very great evil which it is most important to cure, the existence of the illusion itself. If there is no evil whatever, how can it be evil that I should be under the impression that there are evils, and why should I trouble to eradicate that impression?

A less extreme and more plausible theory is the optimistic doctrine, taught in the ancient world by the Stoics, and often repeated by optimists of later times, that though evil is not a pure illusion, it is only relative. What really is bad for one individual, or one group of individuals in the universe would prove, if we could follow out its inter-connection with the whole system, actually to contribute to the perfection and goodness of the universe at large. "Partial evil" proves, on a long view, to be "universal good," and, as Mandeville maintained, "private vices" are "public benefits." As Chrysippus put it, the worst sufferings, blunders, and crimes of men are, in the

life of the universe, what rants, doggerel, and bad grammar may be in a good play, sorry stuff, considered in themselves, but an actual beauty when taken in their setting as contributing to a total effect. To find fault with their presence in the world is like censuring Shakespeare for the blunders of Dogberry, or the vapourings of Ancient Pistol.

That is one possible theory of evil, and it is a theory which commended itself vastly to the leisured and well-to-do gentlemen who were responsible for so much of the literature of the eighteenth century; it is always easy to take this rosy-coloured view of "partial evil" when one does not happen to be oneself the affected "part." If one is that part, one is more likely to sympathise with Voltaire's tremendous and imperishable mockery of the theory in *Candide*. A doctrine of this kind not only outrages our feelings; it is profoundly unsatisfying to our intellect in two ways. Even if we have the faith to believe—what manifestly cannot be *proved*—that every pain and every crime, somehow and somewhere, produces consequences in which there is overwhelmingly more of good than there is of evil in itself, it is pure confusion of mind to mistake the goodness of consequences for the goodness of their cause. It is not clear that *all* "partial evil" is productive of good, and, if it were, to be *productive* of good is one thing, to *be* good another.

And this becomes specially clear when we remember that, in the majority of cases, the "part" or "parts" who benefit by the good consequences are not the same "parts" who have to endure the evil. That the burnt child learns to keep away from the fire is no proof that the pain of an agonising burn is not a bad thing; still less can we argue that it is no

evil that Johnny should be burned to death, since his fate teaches Tommy and Dick not to play with matches. (Not to urge the unwelcome question whether, as the world goes, it is not the more common experience that a good many Johnnies have to be burned to teach one Tommy the lesson.) There is, after all, something stupid in supposing that you have got rid of the patent fact that an evil is evil by calling it "partial"; to say that it is partial is only to utter the truism that *someone* in particular has to suffer it. As Cissy Jupe says in Dickens, the knowledge that only one person out of a million dies annually from starvation in the streets of London does not make such a fate any more tolerable to the one.

I do not see that matters would be much mended by calling modern evolutionary science to our aid and declaring, in the fashion of a good deal of the popular thinking of the end of the nineteenth century, that evil of all kinds, from physical suffering to crime, is no more than "failure to make good" in the progressive adjustment to our "environment," or a relapse into ways of response which have become inappropriate as the "environment" develops. The difficulty about all views of this kind is the same as that which arises when we try to take colloquial language seriously and confuse a bad man with a "beast"; all such language betrays a wholly inadequate sense of the gravity of moral evil. We might, perhaps, make shift to regard all physical suffering as no more than so much failure in adequate response to a situation, though it is an uncomfortable reflection that all evolutionary ascent seems to make the organism more complicated, more liable to derangement, and consequently more sensitive to

pain. It may fairly be doubted whether the " corporal sufferance " of a dying beetle really is comparable with that of a dying giant, and, at any rate, it seems quite untrue that the beetle suffers anything like what is endured by most men in their death.

But when we come to consider moral evil, the case appears overwhelmingly plain. To say nothing about the " beasts," a bad savage is no more on the same level with a bad man of great mental powers in a civilised society than a good savage is on the same level with the saint or the hero. For good and for bad alike, the motives of the civilised man are on a wholly different plane from those of the savage or the barbarian. If all moral badness is stupidity of some sort, it is, at least, a very special kind of stupidity, not to be confused with general ignorance or backwardness. It takes high intelligence to be greatly wicked, no less than to be greatly good ; every step in the general development of mankind towards higher levels of intelligence brings with it the possibility of new and finer virtues, if growing intelligence is used rightly, but also the possibility of new and graver sins if it is abused. And we may add that the growing " solidarity " of human interests also makes it increasingly possible for the criminal, as well as for the virtuous, acts of one man to affect the lives of countless others.

The recent world-war, for example, was something very different from a mere " reversion to savagery " ; it would have been impossible except to a world in a " high state of civilisation." The motives of those who brought it about would have been unintelligible to savages, for one thing ; the engines of its worst devastations would have been unknown to them,

for another; and, for a third, the social organisation which made it impossible for any considerable community to remain outside the conflict would have had no existence in a state of "savagery." When we give the reins to human wickedness, we run a far worse danger than that of sinking back into the state of "animals"; we risk becoming something like "devils." We sometimes talk of the "human tiger" in connection with monstrous badness. But a real tiger is not cruel; it only kills when it is hungry; a cruel man kills and tortures, when he is cruel enough, with the artist's enjoyment of his own cruelties.

The Specially Christian Conception of Evil

In sharp contrast with ideas of the kind we have been considering stands that view of evil which is characteristic not merely of Christianity, but of Christianity in common with great philosophies of profoundly ethical inspiration, like those of Plato and Kant. From this point of view, the defect of all the theories just mentioned is that they treat the evil in the world as all of one kind and capable of being brought equally well under one descriptive formula. The Platonic position, as we may conveniently call it after one of its most eloquent assertors, is that evil is not of one kind but of several. Want, for example, is really an evil thing, so is bodily disease, so is the moral disease we call sin. But they are not all equally evils. Disease, which has its seat within the person, is an intenser and more typical evil than want, which has its seat in his circumstances; and incomparably worse than either is sin, which has its

seat in the inmost citadel of his personality, his soul. The supreme and typical evil is neither want nor bodily disease, but the moral sickness of sin. Suffering is bad, and may be very bad indeed, but sin is incommensurably worse.

On that point, Plato and Kant, to mention no other names, are wholly in accord with the traditional teaching of Christianity. They would agree, further, on the reason why sin is so incomparably the worst of evils; you can say of it, what you could not say equally of suffering, that it is something which *absolutely* ought not to be, has *no* "proper place." (You could not say this, for example, of all suffering; there is visibly a "proper place" for some suffering. It is "in place" that the organism should be warned of the presence of imminent perils and stimulated to repel them; it is no less "in place" that I should get my "lesson" when I violate the rights of my neighbour.) It is a significant fact that the philosophers who have been really and profoundly in earnest with morality have regularly also, like both Plato and Kant, been equally in earnest with belief in God as at once the supreme directing power in the universe and the upholder of the moral law, who judges every man according to his works. If we share their moral faith in God, the conviction that sin is something which absolutely has *no* "proper place" at once becomes the conviction that sin is also something which is absolutely "against God's will," not "in the divine plan."

Now, of course, there is something at least apparently paradoxical about such a conception. It raises the question how it can be possible that there should be a God who directs the whole course of heaven and earth and also be anything which is "not in God's plan."

Are we not contradicting ourselves in express terms when we profess belief in God and then go on to say of anything that it is contrary to God's will, or opposed to his plan?

"*If plagues or earthquakes break not Heaven's design,*
Why, then, a Borgia, or a Catiline?"

The Platonist, or the Christian, would at once reject the suggestion Pope is making. He would say that there is a great difference between Borgia or Catiline and the earthquake. The earthquake may not be "breaking Heaven's design" at all; it may be directly a "minister fulfilling his word"; there is a proper place for it in the scheme of things. But, though God, no doubt, may and does in the end bring good results out of the crimes of Catiline or Borgia, the criminals and their criminal acts are never "in place"; they are not "ministers," but rebels and traitors, who only minister to the divine plan in the sense in which one might say that Jeffreys ministered to the humanisation of legal procedure in cases of treason. But we must not blind ourselves to the fact that the apparent paradox is really there, and that acceptance, not only of Christianity but even of a philosophy like that of Plato or Kant, requires us to accept it. This is where both Christianity and Platonism part company with every kind of "naturalism," even if it is the naturalism of a noble nature like Spinoza's. Both hold that God "brings good out of evil," "overcomes evil with good," but neither can admit that Catiline and Borgia serve God as a storm or earthquake does.

Christianity, we must candidly avow, even accentuates the paradox inherent in Platonism by definitely

teaching that the source of sin, incomparably the worst of evils, lies in the *will*, and thus making a clear distinction between sin and mere ignorance or well-meant mistake. It is no more than the historic fact that Augustine's definite formulation of this doctrine is the starting-point for the whole modern development of the psychology of will, a subject which had never deeply interested Greek moralists and philosophers. Will has come to be of first-rate importance in ethics and psychology, because Augustine had made it of such capital importance for theology. In other words, the real or apparent paradox about evil to which we have just referred has its specially human side; it is also the paradox of "free will." When the source of moral evil has been found in the will, this statement that there is real unqualified evil in the world implies that a creature with an intelligent will can set itself knowingly in an attitude of deliberate rebellion against the law of eternal right, which is also the law of the Creator.

There can be something worse than "imperfect adaptation," wilful defiance. Hence the mystery, or paradox, of free will is a central feature of any philosophy of morals inspired by Christian conviction, and this is not affected by the controversies about Predestination. It is a pure misunderstanding to suppose that the theologians who have insisted most on Predestination, from Augustine downward, have meant for a moment to question the freedom of men's wills. But for their equal acceptance of divine sovereignty and human freedom, the problem of grace and free will would never have existed to distress the theologians' minds.

As it is, it would not be wrong to say that the vital

difference between all " naturalistic " moral doctrines and doctrines conceived in the spirit of Christian ethics, even when, like Kant's, they aim at being wholly independent of the theology of historical Christianity, is that the first all deny or explain away the freedom of the will, the second build on it as a corner-stone. I do not mean that these latter are committed to any particular attempt to rationalise the freedom they assume as a fundamental fact. The difference between the two types of theory is a difference of *moral* orientation. The point is that a man who thinks Christianly has a sense of his personal responsibility for the moral evil in himself which a man who thinks naturalistically never has. The " naturalist " can, the Christian cannot, evade taking the ultimate responsibility for the evil in his life by transferring it to the account of someone or something else—God, or a " step-motherly nature." The secret attractiveness which the naturalistic way of thinking has for most of us, perhaps for all of us at times, is that it " saves our face " ; it enables us to get out of owning as our own the full shame of our most shameful acts.

This explains why Augustine, in his *Confessions*, treats his own early Manicheanism as a heinous moral fault rather than a mere intellectual mistake. He feels that his secret reason for being so ready to believe in the limitation of the divine power by the existence of an opposing evil principle lay in his own pride ; he wished to ascribe the worst in his own life to lack of power in God rather than to rebelliousness in his own will. John Stuart Mill tells us, in his *Autobiography*, that his father often expressed surprise that the Manichean attribution of

the evil in the world to a bad principle which hinders the activity of God should not be seriously revived by modern thinkers. Is not the explanation precisely that men who are in earnest with moral good and evil instinctively recoil from any speculation which flatters human vanity by relieving us of the full responsibility for our moral badness in this fashion? They are acutely sensible that, whatever excuses we may try to make to ourselves and for ourselves, wickedness is not the same sort of thing as a wretched memory or a weak heart, a misfortune which we "cannot help," and they prefer intellectual honesty about the matter to self-compliments, as they all at heart prefer the criminal who owns his crime candidly to the commoner type who represents himself as the sympathetic victim of circumstance.

And perhaps one may be allowed to suggest that the same explanation accounts for the general opposition of theologians to speculations of all kinds about a "finite God." The usual motive of such speculations is precisely to find some *tertium quid*, neither God nor ourselves, on which to lay the blame for the fact that the actual world has so much that is bad in it. If there is no such *tertium quid*, it is felt, the blame must be laid either on God or on the creatures themselves. May we not suspect that, unconsciously, the revivers of the doctrine of divine finitude complete their argument by adding, "and as it is impious to lay the blame on God, so it is humiliating to lay it on the creatures; we are too decent a set of fellows for that"?

Primarily, of course, the doctrine we are considering is a doctrine of sin, and though it teaches that sin is incomparably the acutest form of evil, it does not

deny that there are evils which are not sin. It fully admits that starvation and disease, for example, are evil things and that there is a vast amount of want and disease in the world which pretty clearly has not its source in the badness of any man's will. The Stoic thesis that sin or vice is the only real evil and that want, disease, suffering are, properly speaking, "things indifferent," has no place in an ethical theory which draws its inspiration from the personal attitude of Christ to the hungry and the suffering. But if the rebellious will of created beings is the source of the most typical form of evil, the possibility is suggested that cosmic evil generally may have the same source. Men may not be the only agents who can defy a known divine law; even the late world-war may not be the supreme example of the extent to which the treason of a created will may affect "the innocent" by its consequences. As existing society is far from being "what God meant it should be," the same thing may be true of "nature" at large, for reasons of the same kind. There may be truth behind imaginative stories like that of the "fall of the angels." To be sure, all such suggestions have to be regarded with extreme caution, but they at least represent real possibilities which make the popular argument from the admitted presence of evil in the world to the conclusion "either no God or an unsatisfactory God" logically worthless.

It would be different, no doubt, if the notion of a free agent or that of a Creator of free agents were not merely paradoxical, that is to say, surprising, but inherently self-contradictory. It is reasonable to believe, on good grounds, in things which are surprising, and one has to do so if one is going to

believe in any " scientific view " of the world ; it would be an insult to our reason to ask us to believe in the self-contradictory. But it can safely be said, though the full discussion of the matter would take us too far from our immediate topic, that there is nothing inherently self-contradictory either in the notion of a free agent or in that of the creation of free agents. The one contradicts only the crude prejudice that an intelligent agent is related to the " motives " of his contemplated acts precisely as a balance is related to the weights put into its scale-pans, the other only the mere assumption that a Creator can only create puppets. To use such argument is simply to assume the very points which are at issue.

With reference to the second of them in particular, it may be observed that it is neither more nor less paradoxical that a creature should be able to rebel against the will of its Creator than it is that a " product of evolution " should be able to detect the plan which " cosmic evolution " has followed in producing itself, dislike it, and set itself to reverse it—the proceeding which Huxley, in his famous Romanes lecture, pronounced to be the supreme moral duty of man.

But the discussion of the special difficulties which have been alleged against the " freedom of the will," as we have said, hardly falls within the scope of this essay. Here it should be enough to say that they are difficulties which, if fatal to belief in freedom, would be equally fatal to the very recognition of moral responsibility. It is more to the point to consider how far the view we have been developing, if accepted, will take us in dealing with the problem created by the actuality of suffering.

Augustine has said that there are two sorts of evil,

that which we commit and that which we suffer as a penalty for this, and that the rebellious will is the source of both. If this meant that we *know* that all suffering in the world is the consequence of sin, it seems to be more than we have a right to say. Much, e.g. that caused by great natural catastrophes, is plainly not the consequence of any human sinful volition; it is, indeed, conceivable that it may be the consequence of evil volitions of non-human agents, but we do not know that this is so, and we have to allow for the possibility that it is not so. It would not be safe to tell ourselves that earthquakes and pestilences which lay fair provinces waste and destroy their helpless inhabitants must be due to the "malice of Satan," and quite impossible to suggest that the parasitical organisms which cause so much intense suffering to us are the creation of Satan, or were introduced into the universe by a sort of divine afterthought, as a penalty for the sin of the "first man." So far as we can see, the very existence of a world of living organisms, intimately interconnected with one another, inevitably involves a considerable amount of suffering for individual organisms. And it is equally an inevitable consequence of the moral "solidarity" without which an ethical society of intelligent agents could not subsist that the consequences of one agent's deeds, for good or bad, should affect others. A world in which no agent was affected except by the consequences of his own volitions would be a world of the coldest and hardest immoral egoism.

These considerations make it impossible, I think, to maintain the theory that all suffering must be a consequence of sin, the sufferer's or that of someone else. Why God should have created the world at

all is a question it is presumptuous to ask and impossible to answer. But the fact that God has created a world in which suffering, so far as we can see, would play a part, even if there were no wrong-doing, cannot be used to disprove God's wisdom or benevolence, except on the very rash assumption that wise benevolence can have only one purpose, that of making its recipients comfortable, a purpose we should hardly regard as the worthiest possible even to a good man in his dealings with his dependents. It would be fully compatible with the divine wisdom and goodness that there should be a good many acute disagreeables in the world to serve an educational purpose, to act as stimulants to energy and intelligence and incentives to improvement; indeed, we can see why it might be desirable that our temporal felicity should never be too complete; if it were, we might be only too prone to repose in it, without making any endeavour towards better things. A wise educator will put difficulties and hard tasks in his pupil's way, precisely that he may be incited to grapple with them and overcome them.

And, again, the appeal to the "good of the whole" as worth some subordination of the special interests of the part is a perfectly sound consideration, provided we are careful to remember two things, that the "good of the whole" does not make wrong-doing right-doing, and that we have, in our ignorance of the final upshot of the whole historical process, no right to say that the "part" is ever merely sacrificed to the whole. We are not entitled, for example, to say "some hardships may have an educational value and some adjustment of part to whole is intelligible, but in the actual world the worst hardships do not

educate, they simply crush and shatter, and the part is recklessly sacrificed without any commensurate advantage to the whole." We do not see the whole process; we do not see what becomes of the individual after it has been removed from our observation, still less all the interconnections of the individual part with the whole: if we saw all this, we might have reason to reverse our judgments completely. It sometimes happens to us in the course of life that we have very bitter experiences from which we learn so much that in retrospect we regard them as among the experiences we would be least willing to have forgone; if we still live and learn beyond the grave, we may yet come to the same judgment on what look to us at present to be the irremediable disasters of a life.

Christianity does not Profess to Explain the Existence of Evil

It should, of course, be clear that neither the Christian nor any other answer to the question what evil is solves the historical or quasi-historical riddle how evil began. Even in the days when the story of Adam or the story of the fall of Satan was taken for literal history, the theologians were always alive to the fact that, even if it were said that all subsequent evil is a consequence of the revolt of Satan, this leaves the question how Satan came to rebel unanswered. What it is important to understand is that on the supposition that, at any rate, the worst and most typical form of evil is moral evil, and that the root of moral evil is in the will, the question how the earliest act of rebellious will came about becomes an illegitimate one. To ask it is to presuppose that there

is still some further and more ultimate root of evil behind the sinful volition, and thus to deny one's own professed assumption. In particular it is not open to anyone who concedes the existence of free agents, and of God as a Creator of free agents, to argue that since God made me, or made Adam, or made Satan, God is the cause of my sin, or Adam's, or Satan's, and therefore is not wholly good, nor to a critic of such theism to argue that since there are sinful agents—myself, for example—there can be no divine Creator.

The point can be illustrated by considering as typical the case of Satan as described in *Paradise Lost*. Satan's "endowments" at the hand of his Creator are all good, as good as those of Abdiel or Raphael. His misconduct is not explained by the presence in his "nature" of some inherently evil constituent absent from the "natures" of his compeers. It is not that there is an original "yellow streak" in him which is not there in the others. The evil lies not in his endowments, but in the use which he chooses to make of them. If one asks, "Why does Satan go wrong?" it is possible to point out that the *possibility* of going wrong is implied in his very freedom. A finite creature incapable of voluntarily going wrong would be equally incapable of voluntarily going right; it cannot have freedom to act rightly without a corresponding freedom to act wrongly. But the initial possibility of choosing wrong does not distinguish Satan, who rebels, from Abdiel, who remains loyal: Abdiel might have been one of the rebels if he had chosen to be one.

When we ask, "But why, then, does Satan choose to rebel, if Abdiel does not?" there is no answer to be given, on the assumption that both are really free

agents. We are, in fact, asking what makes a spontaneous act be done. If the act *is* spontaneous, there can be no solution to our puzzle; in reaching the spontaneous choice we have reached a *first* cause and cannot go behind it. As Kant puts it, when we find ourselves trying to say "*how* freedom is possible," we have reached "the limit of practical reason." This strikes us, who have the tendency always to ask for a reason behind every assigned reason, as paradoxical, but it is not absurd or contradictory. What would be contradictory would be that there should be a remoter cause behind a spontaneous act.

Now, moral choices are not the only examples of spontaneity; it is, indeed, obvious that in the inanimate world itself, however far we may go in accounting for movements as communicated from outside, there must be movements which have to be assumed to be original and spontaneous, and of which we cannot ask the question from what quarter they were communicated; *all* the movements in the universe cannot have come there by being "passed on" from somewhere else. In a system of physics, when you have started by assuming various elements with spontaneous motions, you can go on to consider the ways in which different elements of the system "pass on" their motions to others, but you cannot get movement into a motionless universe by communication from outside. In the same way, if there is a moral choice for which I am responsible in the full sense of the words, however much I may have been influenced in making that choice by the example or suggestion of someone else, the fact remains that I made the choice, it was not made for me by others, or the responsibility would be theirs and not mine, just

as the responsibility for the contents of a letter is with the writer and not with the postman who delivers it.

In fact, we are confronted with a dilemma ; either the acts for which an agent is morally fully responsible have his choice for their *first* cause, and then the question " What other agent caused him to choose so ? " is senseless, or there is really no such thing as moral responsibility at all. And, as Kant used to insist, though we cannot *demonstrate* that moral responsibility is real, we know what to think of the character of a man who seriously denies its reality. It is this consideration that a responsible agent is a *first* cause of his voluntary acts which make it wholly illegitimate to argue either that God is the real cause of my sin, or Satan's, or alternatively, that the existence of sinners, like Satan and myself, is reason for doubting the existence of God. If this is a paradox, it is a paradox created by the very fact that I am I,

" *With power on my own act and on the world.*"

Nor does Christianity Explain Completely how Good is Brought out of Evil

Considerations like those we have been suggesting, if we will ponder them thoughtfully, should incline us to moderate our anticipations of any very complete " justification " of the evil in the world. A prudent man would do well to be suspicious of any philosophy or any theology which professed to give too confident an answer to the question why there is as much evil in the world as there is, or what is the " greater good " subserved by it. Why there should be just the particular world there is, and not a very different one,

is a problem to which there can be no answer, and a theistic religion or philosophy does not provide the answer by merely referring to God as the author of the world. The most unqualified assertion of the power, wisdom, and goodness of God does not entitle us to the presumptuous declaration that we know what the " purpose of God in creation " must have been, still less to the even more presumptuous conviction that his purpose must have been our own maximum convenience.

The utmost that the theistic believer, or the Christian believer, is entitled by his faith to assert is that, in the attainment of the divine purpose, be it what it may, his own true good is not immorally sacrificed; the world which God has made is a world in which there is nothing, except our own morally evil will, which can prevent any of us from attaining " the full stature of the perfect man," and nothing which may not be made into an actual help to the attainment of that stature. Even this, of course, is not demonstrable; indeed, one could not say that it can be *shown* to be more probable than not. There is no basis in fact for an estimate of the " probabilities." Equally as little is there any basis for demonstration or " probable proof " that the conviction of the theist is false. It is an open possibility—on one condition.

If it were, indeed, certain, or all but certain, that there is no continuation to our personal life on the other side of the grave, it might fairly be said that evil is in the end triumphant over good, at any rate in our province of the universe, since the whole hard ascent to the " perfect man " ends in nothing, and this is an undeniable and terrible evil. But, in truth, it is fully as impossible to prove the perishability of

human personality as the most sceptical have ever supposed it impossible to prove human immortality.

To act on either conviction is to commit oneself to a faith, optimistic or pessimistic, which outruns both demonstration and calculation of probabilities. It is sometimes said, as it was once said by W. K. Clifford, that it is immoral to hold a belief which is not strictly proportioned to the "probabilities." It should rather be said that the only kind of belief which has a moral character, as at once revealing the quality of the person who acts on it and morally ennobling his personality, is a belief to which this whole business of balancing rival "probabilities" is irrelevant. The belief which at once discloses a noble moral character and ennobles it further is the kind of faith which holds water even when the "probabilities" seem to be all against it.

This is the quality of the belief a man has in the character of a personal friend, or in the cause and destinies of his country, and in either case, held to, it will make a hero of him. It calls for no heroism and inspires none to believe, if it can be called believing, in the probity of my friend or the future of my country just so long as all the appearances are preponderatingly favourable. It may call for much heroism to avow my belief, and evoke still more to act up to it, when it is held in the face of appearances which I do not know how to explain away. Belief of this quality in anything or any person is not a particularly easy thing; it is, indeed, decidedly "costing," and its transforming effects on character are actually due to its "costing" a real effort to keep alight. To believe in a man, or in a country, in the face of hostile experiences is, for that very reason, a real education of

character. Of course it does not follow that the belief must be true because it has this ennobling effect. We have only to look out into the world about us to see examples of men, perhaps still more often of women, whose lives are made heroic by faith in a man whom the rest of us can see to be a rascal, or in a cause which is really worthless. The Jacobites of history are not the only persons who have lavished a priceless devotion on fools and ingrates.

But, as we have just been saying, this is no more than is true of every conviction which has a moral worth; an inspiring belief is always something which is believed *quand même*. It is repugnant to our natural indolence to make the effort involved in acting on such a belief, as it is repugnant to the same indolence to make the physical effort to overcome our own inertia; yet there is a universal truth to the pungent words of a living wit and scholar: "How the world is managed, and why it was created, I cannot tell, but it is no feather-bed for the repose of sluggards." The author of the sentence, Mr. A. E. Housman, if one may judge from the tone of his verse, is no theist, certainly no Christian, but his words are as applicable to the difficulties created for the Christian theist by the presence of evil in the world as they are to the difficulty, with which he was immediately concerned, of extracting a correct text of a classical author from the conflicting corruptions of mediæval manuscripts.

Christianity neither Explains nor Justifies Evil, but Shows us how to Triumph over it

The plain fact is that the difference between a Christian theory of life and various non-Christian

theories is not that Christianity offers us a professed "explanation" of the evil in the world, and that the alternatives to it do not. No theory we can devise presents us with the explanation of the mystery, and therefore we may neither argue that Christianity ought to be accepted because it makes plain what other theories leave mysterious, nor yet that it ought to be rejected because its explanation of the mystery is untenable. What Christianity has professed to do and what we see that it has done in countless lives, as no other doctrine or faith has done, is not to explain evil but to enable us to triumph over it by converting the apparently most irreparable disasters of life into actual instruments towards the enriching of spiritual personality. And for beings like mankind, whose most pressing concern, when all is said, is not to theorise about life but to live it worthily, it is the conquest of evil, not the explanation of it, that matters supremely.

Christianity, as Baron von Hügel says in his wise and tender essay on *Preliminaries to Religious Belief*,[1] conquered the philosophy of Greece and the power of Rome in a fair fight, and conquered "above all because of what it achieved with regard to suffering." It did not conquer by offering a superior "explanation" of the facts. As von Hügel says, it deliberately rejected the two only attempts at self-persuasion which "possess souls that suffer whilst they have not yet found the deepest." It refused Epicureanism because man cannot "find his deepest" by fleeing from pain and seeking pleasures, however refined; it refused Stoicism since both pain and sin are no illusions but intensely real. What it set against

[1] *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 98–116.

both theories was no theory but the spectacle of a fact, the fact of a life in which "life's nettle" was grasped and mastered. "It pointed to Jesus with the terror of death upon him in Gethsemane; with a cry of desolation upon the Cross on Calvary; it allowed the soul, it encouraged the soul, to sob itself out. . . . And yet . . . the final note of Christianity was, and is still, one of trust, of love, of transcendent joy."

And we must not say, as is sometimes said, that the alternative is between some "non-religious" theory of the world, which may be repellent and disheartening, but has the merit of admitting and explaining the facts, and a "religious" faith, which is pleasing and encouraging, but ignores the facts or leaves them unexplained. For, as von Hügel goes on to say, no faith, no science, no popular tradition, does or can explain the undeniable facts. The real alternative is between "systems which remain variously unreal and unhuman with regard to suffering, and which know only how to evade or to travesty pain and to deny sin "and" religion, which fully fronts, indeed extends and deepens infinitely, our sense of suffering and sin, and which, nevertheless, alone surmounts and utilises them." The ultimate choice, when "the worst comes to the worst," is the practical choice between the attitude of the soul which finds its last comfort in escape from the evils of life by the "open door" of suicide and that of the soul which can say, "In all this we are more than conquerors."

It is a fact well worth reflecting on that none of the non-religious systems the world has known has ever, apparently, felt itself equal to the closing of the "open door" by the absolute prohibition of suicide as a way of escape out of a man's

troubles. There is something in life from which all these philosophies fairly run away, and the running away is a practical confession of impotence. But the great ethical religions, Christianity, for example, or Judaism, neither run away from the facts nor shut their eyes to them; they face them and make them minister to the soul's deepest necessities. They can do so, as the rival philosophies cannot, because, to quote von Hügel once more, those who believe in them "worship and adore not Nature, but God—the love and the action of God within and from behind the world, but not as though this love and action were everywhere equally evident, not as though they directly willed, directly chose, all things that happen and as they happen." If the believer, like no other man, can, and often does, not merely endure but "conquer" the worst life brings to him by converting it into actual "glorious gain," the secret of the conquest is not that he has seen the "explanation" of the mystery; it lies in a faith, neither to be proved nor to be disproved, that behind the mystery, which remains as much a mystery as ever, there is a loving wisdom. "We are the conquerors, through him who loved us." The "proof" of the love is the victory to which it inspires; if we reject that proof, there is no other to be given.

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